

Destination Unknown by glorious_spoon

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Negotiations, Relationship Negotiation

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Summary:

There's a tear in the fabric of spacetime in his front hall and his house is swarming with scientists. Steve needs a place to stay.

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Author's Note:

For a Tumblr prompt by laylinalaska:

a timestamp from "This Far From the Borderline" that answers the question: where did Steve go to recuperate when he got out of the hospital, since his house is full of Hawkins Lab scientists and rifts in the fabric of spacetime?

It took a solid ten minutes of arguing before Doc Owens would agree to let him in the house to grab his wallet and a few changes of clothes. Times like this, he wished Nancy was around, for the purely selfish reason that her bulldog stubbornness would have been incredibly useful. Steve wasn't that used to arguing on his own behalf (or, he thought with a vaguely guilty pang, of *needing* to argue on his own behalf), but all he had to wear right now was hospital scrubs and one mangled pair of filthy jeans, so he found himself fairly motivated.

"You get your stuff, and you get out of here," Owens said, finally relenting. "It isn't safe."

"I got sucked into an interdimensional rift and nearly eaten *last week*," Steve retorted. "I know it isn't safe, I just want some clean fucking pants, okay? Then you guys can get back to your—" he waved a hand vaguely at the Hazmat-suit-clad scientists swarming his front hall. "Whatever it is you're doing. I don't give a shit."

Owens fixed him with a gimlet eye. "I've had enough trouble with that girlfriend of yours. I don't need trouble with you, too."

"She's not my girlfriend anymore," Steve said, stung, and shoved past him to get up the stairs. It probably would have been a more impressive exit if he hadn't had to cling to the banister to stay upright; he'd left his crutches in the trunk.

For all the posturing, though, just being in the house right now made him antsy. The scientists seemed pretty sure that the distortion, or whatever the hell it was, was confined to the front hallway, but Steve was pretty damn sure that he wouldn't be able to put his head down on his own pillow for months without worrying about waking up in that fucking endless void full of monsters.

That did, however, leave him with the problem of where the hell to sleep in the meantime. His mom and dad had taken (separate) hotel rooms at the Hilton over in Indianapolis. That was always an option, but the idea of holing up in some anonymous hotel room wasn't really that much better than the idea of sleeping in his house.

What the hell, he thought, slinging his gym bag over his shoulder and starting down the walk toward his car. Maybe Dustin's mom would let him camp out on the couch. Or he could stay with Hopper. Or—

“How long until they'll let you back in the house?”

Steve jolted to a stop, and looked up to see Jonathan sitting on the hood of that rusted-out beater he drove, parked by the curb in front of Steve's house. Everything about his pose was painfully, studiously casual in a way that reminded Steve sharply of the hospital room, a couple of hours ago. The way he'd blushed when their hands touched.

It was possible—likely, in fact—that he was misreading it, what it all meant, so he just shrugged with one shoulder, studiously casual himself, and said, “Good fucking question, man. I practically had to beg them to let me get some spare underwear.”

Jonathan nodded, half to himself. “Where are you staying?”

“Why?” Steve asked, tilting his head, genuinely curious. They'd never really been friends, him and Jonathan. But still, there was something there. Jonathan had gone into the rift after him. And yeah, most of that was that Jonathan would follow Nancy straight into hell if she took it into her head to head that way.

He'd gone into the rift, though, and he'd killed the monster with Steve's own nail bat, and he'd held him and soothed him and let him

cry into his goddamn shirt, and the memory of that wasn't as excruciatingly humiliating as it could have been, either. That probably meant something.

(He knew exactly what it meant to him. But Jonathan wasn't him, and it was a pretty long stretch from hugging someone who was freaking out in a monster-infested hellhole to... well. To the kind of things that Steve sometimes thought about when he looked at Jonathan and Nancy together.)

"I just..." Jonathan shoved his hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunching. "I just, if you need a place to stay, you can stay with me."

Steve blinked. "What?"

"You don't have to," Jonathan added hastily. "But, I mean, we have an old Army cot floating around somewhere, my mom won't mind, and there is, there'd be..." He shrugged a little. "There'd be people around. That helps, you know?"

"Yeah," Steve said, because Jonathan got it. Of course he got it. He'd been through the exact same insane shit that Steve had in the past couple of years. Him and Nancy both. "Yeah, actually. Thanks, man. You're sure you don't mind?"

Jonathan's shoulders relaxed almost imperceptibly. He gave Steve a small smile. "I don't mind. I wouldn't have offered if I did."

"All right, cool," Steve said, and hobbled across the driveway to unlock his car. "Let's do it."

When they got to Jonathan's house, Nancy was there, sitting at the table with Mrs. Byers and Jonathan's little brother. She smiled up at them when they came in. "You talked him into it?"

"Talked me into *what*?" Steve asked. And then, to Mrs. Byers, "You're sure you don't mind? Seriously, I can get a hotel room."

"Oh, honey, I don't mind at all," she said, and stood, crossed the room, and hugged him. Steve blinked, his hands hovering in mid-air, unsure what to do with them. She was small and wiry and smelled

like cigarette smoke, and there was something fierce about the hug in a way that he was entirely unused to. "You should be around people right now. And your parents are—"

She broke off abruptly and released him, looking vaguely embarrassed.

"Mom, come on," Jonathan said.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Byers said. "That was rude."

"It's okay," Steve said, both relieved and oddly disappointed that she'd let go of him. "They're in Indianapolis."

"Hmm," she said, with clear disapproval in her tone, and then looked across the kitchen at Will. "Will, sweetie, it's time to go."

Will looked up from the sheet of paper he was laboring over with a colored pencil. "But, Mom—"

"You need a haircut, you're starting to look like that guy from the movies, Chewbie—"

"*Chewbacca*. Can't we go tomorrow? I'm in the middle of something."

"I have to work tomorrow. Let's go."

"Fine, fine..."

She hustled him out the door, complaining all the time, kissed Jonathan and Nancy both on the cheek, patted Steve's arm, and then was gone. Jonathan pulled the door shut after her, looked at Steve, and said, "I'm sorry."

"It's fine. It's..." Steve glanced out the window, where Mrs. Byers was ruffling Will's over-long hair while he batted her hand away, laughing. "Your mom's cool, man."

"Yeah," Jonathan said, after a moment. "Yeah, she really is."

Nancy spoke up then. "Jonathan? The cot's all set up, if you want to..."

There was a meaningful undercurrent to her words that Steve couldn't read at all, but Jonathan obviously could, from the way he jumped. "Oh! Uh, yeah, come on. It's right through here."

Steve followed him down the narrow hallway, which looked weirdly normal compared to the last two times he'd been here. Jonathan's room was on the left, the shades drawn, stacks of records by bands Steve didn't know piled on every surface. There was a giant, ratty *Evil Dead* poster on one wall, and about a dozen black-and-white photos, mostly of Nancy, taped to the other. The bed was unmade, and a narrow cot with a sleeping bag on it was shoved against the far wall. Steve set his bag down on it, then sat down himself. Then rested his head back against the paneled wall. His leg ached in a dull, throbbing kind of way, and he was starting to feel faintly dizzy from the Vicodin. He probably actually shouldn't have been driving. Jonathan paused in the door, turned back toward Nancy as she approached on her crutches.

"Should I...?" he asked softly.

"No," she said back, just as quietly. She glanced over his shoulder at Steve, and smiled. "I think it would be better if I did."

Jonathan glanced over at him and smiled, too; his was nervous.

"Okay," he said, and hesitated, and then kissed Nancy briefly on the lips and slipped out of the room.

Steve raised his eyebrows at Nancy as she crutched across the room and sank down onto the cot next to him. "Very subtle. That wasn't weird at all."

"I've given up on subtlety when it comes to you," she said, but it was fond.

"That's probably smart."

Nancy laughed. She was twisting her hands together in her lap, and Steve just watched her for a moment. Whatever cloak-and-dagger shit she and Jonathan were up to now, it was... nice, surprisingly so, just to be here, and he was content to wait as long as it took her to spit it

out. Maybe it was the painkillers. Or maybe it was just that being around Nancy always sort of felt like home. Like a quiet place to rest.

Eventually, she took a deep breath, and said, “We should talk.”

“I’d say that sounds ominous, but you already dumped me, like, last year,” Steve said. It wasn’t as sharp as it might have been six months ago, but he could still feel the memory of that ache, enough that it was hard to keep his voice light.

“Actually, that’s what I...” She blew out a breath. “What I said at that Halloween party, that was really shitty. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“No, it’s— Steve, I didn’t *mean* it, okay, I was angry, and, and frustrated, and I just...” She trailed off.

“Nancy,” he said. “Seriously. It’s okay. Ancient history. I was a shithead, I should have figured out... Anyway, look, you guys saved my life last week, so I figure that more than cancels out some dumb argument, right?”

“I should have made a list,” Nancy muttered, sounding frustrated. “That’s not... I wasn’t just pretending to be in love with you. Okay?”

Steve blinked. “Oh.”

“And I know it’s been, God, almost a year and I know you might not still—” She was talking faster now, like she was trying to get it all out. “I know you might not still feel the same way, but I see you looking at me and I see you looking at *Jonathan* and we— and I thought we could—”

Steve stared at her as she dropped her hands into her lap and looked up at him anxiously. After a moment, very carefully, he said, “You thought we could... what?”

Nancy took a deep breath, let it out, visibly forcing herself to calm, then said, “If you could date both of us, would you want to?”

“What?” It came out as a whisper, weirdly dry.

“If you could—”

“No, I heard you, I just...” He trailed off, pushed his fingers through his hair. His heart was thudding, like he was perched at the peak of a roller-coaster. Or the top of a very tall cliff. “Please tell me you’re not fucking with me.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” Nancy said quietly. “We wouldn’t do that.”

“No,” Steve agreed. “No, you wouldn’t. And Jonathan...”

“We talked about it. I— we don’t have any idea what we’re doing either, but I think it could be good, you know? We both do. It could be really good.” She looked up at him with wide blue eyes, and when he didn’t answer, she added, “But, look, you don’t have to answer right now, it’s fine if you don’t want to— we can just pretend this never...”

“Nancy,” Steve managed finally. She was staring up at him, her eyes wide and her lips parted, and fuck it: he’d never been much good at talking, anyway. When he bent his head and kissed her, it felt like coming home.

Nancy was smiling when they broke apart. “So that’s a yes?”

“Yeah. Shit, of course it’s a yes.” He raised his voice slightly. “You can stop lurking in the hallway, man.”

Jonathan appeared in the doorway a second later; he really had been lurking. “So, uh.”

He looked both hopeful and horribly anxious in a way that made Steve’s heart lurch. And yeah, he didn’t have any fucking clue what he was doing, but neither did they, from the looks of things, and he’d always been pretty good at winging it.

“Hey,” he said. “Come here.”

Jonathan swallowed visibly and made his way carefully into the room, coming to a stop in front of them. Steve braced his palm on the bed and stood up carefully, balancing his weight on his right foot so that his left leg didn’t give out and dump him into an embarrassing

heap on the floor.

Jonathan was almost his height, tall enough that he barely had to tilt his head up to look at Steve. Taller than anyone he'd ever kissed.

"Hey," he said again, softly, and reached out to cup Jonathan's cheek. His skin was faintly rough, and he breathed in sharply, and for an instant Steve was terribly afraid that he'd misunderstood them completely, that this was all going to come tumbling down.

Jonathan took another breath, and then he turned his face into Steve's touch, a smile curving his mouth, and it seemed like the easiest thing in the world to close the gap between them, to slide his fingers back into Jonathan's hair and kiss him softly on the lips.

Nancy made a soft sound from his left, and one of Jonathan's hands had found its way to the back of his neck, pulling him in closer, deepening the kiss. He was smiling when they broke apart, looking pink-cheeked and *happy* in a way that Steve had rarely seen him.

"So," he said. "We're really doing this."

"Hell yeah we're doing this," Steve said. Then his leg wobbled dangerously beneath him and he added, "But I think I should sit down now."

He plopped on the cot in a way he hoped looked cool and intentional but which, going by the looks both Nancy and Jonathan were giving him, probably didn't.

"What happened to your crutches, anyway?" Jonathan asked, after a moment.

"Uh." Steve waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the window. "Trunk. I didn't think I needed them."

"You didn't think you..." Jonathan sighed, exasperated. Nancy made a sound that was suspiciously like a snort of laughter. "Give me your keys."

Steve opened his mouth, shut it, then fished his keys out of his pocket and handed them over.

"I'm getting your crutches," Jonathan said. "Just... stay there, okay?"

He took two steps toward the door, then turned back, leaned down, and kissed Steve firmly on the lips again.

"Stay there," he said again, and was gone.

"Um," Steve said, touching his lips, feeling slightly dazed.

"He's worried about you, you idiot," Nancy said, but it was gentle. "We both were."

"I'm okay. Seriously. How's your leg, though?"

"My leg is fine, because I actually use my crutches." Nancy wrapped an arm around his waist and rested her head against his shoulder, and it wasn't... it was familiar but different. Not just different, he thought, listening to the sound of his trunk swinging open, Jonathan muttering to himself through the open window. Better. He and Nancy had never quite fit right together, as much as he'd tried to pretend otherwise. And then she'd broken things off, and he'd figured it was just one of those things that wasn't meant to be.

Now, though, he thought it hadn't been that they didn't fit. It's just that there had been a piece missing all along.

"So, you're staying, right?" Nancy asked, as the trunk slammed shut. He could hear Jonathan's steps on the front steps, the metallic clatter as he dropped one of the crutches and then swore.

He rested his cheek on the top of her head and wrapped an arm around her. "I'm not going anywhere."